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Sirs:

     As a more-or-less close observer of the agony of Indochina over
the past 25 years, I feel compelled to offer an early comment on the
"very preliminary look" at the Community's coverage during the final
months in the June RONI. Over the years, the Community generally
has done a credible job of analyzing the capabilities, strengths,
weaknesses, and likely courses of action of the Communists in
Indochina than of the non-Communists. This was true in the French
war in the early 50's, as well as in the 60's and 70's. Most of the
"shock" developments throughout these three decades have been related
to the <u>unanticipated</u> failures or deficiencies of the non-Communists--
political and military--in coping with <u>foreseen</u> levels of Communist
capabilities and pressures.

     • The only "real" surprise of the Dieh Bien Phu campaign was
the paralysis of the French command--and its loss of nerve--when
confronted with the reality of the onslaught by Viet Minh forces
whose strength and preparations had been assessed accurately and in
detail by intelligence. The confident "let them come" challenge by
the French on the eve of battle was replaced by shock and dismay when
their artillery and air support proved ineffective in breaking up the
expected Communist assaults.

     • The late 50's and early 60's were marked by misplaced confi-
dence in the anticipated performance of Vietnamese military and
security forces against the well-defined and clearly growing Viet
Cong threat.

     • The real "shock" of the Tet offensive stemmed primarily
from exaggerated perceptions of the cumulative effects of the
application of U.S. military power over the preceding two-and-a-half
years, rather than from a lack of indications of an impending major
enemy offensive.

     • In the final denouement, the surprise factor--as noted in
RONI-was the collapse of ARVN (when the realization hit home at all
levels that ARVN would no longer be supported in the manner to which
it had become accustomed, i.e., the B-52's would never return),
rather than the accurately assessed weight of enemy pressure.

     • This record clearly highlights a long-standing source of
frustration to intelligence analysts and their consumers--that of
making <u>net assessments</u> in "real-world" situations when inputs on one

side of the equation are influenced by the subjective views and judg-
ments of operating officials committed to the successful execution of
policies, strategies and programs. Too often is the net judgment
subverted or dominated by the overconfident and insistent views of
operators and policy-makers concerning the "progress" achieved by
friendly activities: The "success" of Operation Atlante and the
expansion of the Vietnamese Army in 1953-54; the impact of U.S. train-
ing for ARVN in 1956-62; the effectiveness of U.S. search and destroy
operations in 1965-67; the "success" of Vietnamization in 1973-75,
inter alia.

    • Although the intelligence appraisals were often less than
perfect, they were generally more pessimistic--or realistic--than the
judgments of the operating officials. But the impartial intelligence
appraisals were often discounted or ignored, or in some cases simply
watered down, by the more subjective, optimistic--and influential--
views of the operators.

    Clearly, one lesson to be learned from our Indochina
experience is the need to evolve a mechanism for providing the policy
maker with truly objective net assessments in situations where the U.S.
is operationally committed--a mechanism that will effectively blend,
if not balance, the voices of the Pollyannas with those of the
Cassandras. The record of Indochina to the end shows that the influence
of the Pollyannas was unduly prominant, to the detriment of the national
interests of the U.S. and of the Vietnamese and American peoples.

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